As If It Happened Yesterday

CHAPTER 1

Outer Vespal, Veronian Republic
May 3rd 1999

Leo Durren stepped out of the cafe as he did every morning and turned right toward the hotel. The route was fixed, the motions memorised — a life lived on a schedule. The air in the southern part of outer Vespal smelled unexpectedly clean; sunlight warmed the pavement. To Leo however it all looked tawdry and flat. And incredibly grey.

He was a man of simply average height, average weight, nothing extraordinary in his appearance. His hair was jet black and his face was long, with small dark brown eyes and a comparatively miniscule nose, typical of his Roxolanian heritage. Leo’s face was wrinkly, always stone cold, because of this he looked at least ten years older than he actually was. He wore a long grey suit. It looked old and was clearly worn continuously for several years, dirt stains could be seen on it.

A car drove by, splashing puddle water on some pedestrians. They shouted at the car in angry Veronian, something about their precious sandals, although the vehicle had already sped off.

Leo walked inside the hotel he was working at precisely on time, like always. He changed into his work clothes and went inside the elevator. This part of the city wasn't that popular to tourists, but it still received people every now and then, and when they came Leo would go up and down with his lift.

Up and down, always up and down.

People coming in coming out, Leo did not care what they thought or did, he just went up and down, up and down.

A half-Anian Kalerdonian, up and down.

A pompous Koroselian, up and down.

Up and down.

And so passed the day, going up and down.

Leo took off his lifting clothes, put on his usual coat, and left without a word, knowing well his coworkers were whispering something behind his back.

He was walking to the bus station, deep in empty thought, when he accidentally bumped into someone.

– Oh, I'm so sorry. – A female voice rang out in Veronian, a language Leo once studied back in Florion, the voice was beautiful, like that of a spring bird.

– I didn't see you there, – she rackled nervously, while scratching at the back of her head, only then did Leo notice her face. It was fairly rounded, the skin was extremely smooth and she had a small nose, and big beautiful hazel eyes behind her glasses. All in all she was pretty, but not in the same way Elena was. She looked about ten years younger than Leo, definitely not below thirty five, but not older than forty.

However he just stared her down coldly, an awkward silence set in before Leo noticed a book on the ground. He picked it up:

– Yours?

– Oh, uhm yes, I dropped it when we bumped into each other.

Leo just placed the book in her hands and continued to walk, without as much as a goodbye.

He felt the woman's eyes on him as he walked

The whole time home Leo wouldn't stop thinking about her, to his own irritation. It did not help that the bus broke down mid way to his home.

Damned Veronian public transport.

Kolosian buses were older and had no air conditioning, but they broke down way less than whatever they had here.

Because of this he came home later than usual, it was a small apartment building, blocky and almost lifeless, but not fully like those back home. Durren used his key and went inside the building, instinctively checking his mailbox while climbing up to his own apartment.

The name on the box, near his apartment number read “John Saldin”. A fake name for his new fake identity.

Leo opened the mailbox, even though there was no one to write to him unless it was a matter of tax.

Except this time there was a letter inside. Certainly not an official government one, this looked different, written by someone private. Leo knew who it was, he could recognise that seal anywhere.

He took out the letter and read it while in the corridor, then scoffed before ripping it apart. Same old, same old.

They never had anything new to say, all they do is try to coerce him back to join the “Restoration Movement” as they call it, as if that's ever gonna work out, that era has passed, Durren sees it clearly, why can't they?

They again tried to warn Leo that the new government in Kolosia is after him and knows his location. They’ve been repeating this same scare tactic for four years now and yet no one has come.

After throwing out what remained of the letter Leo continued on to his apartament, to sleep and start another of such monotonous days.

Yet he fell asleep thinking of that woman he bumped into on the way back home, her voice was so beautiful…

Julion, Kolosian Socialist Republic
August 1979

He had just graduated, finally all that work and political study in the Revolutionary Politics Faculty of Florion had paid off.

His application to join the United Workers Party, or UWP as many called it, was accepted shortly after graduation and Leo immediately traveled back to Julion to assume his new position and tell the good news to Elena, his parents already knew, after all it was their plan for him that was being realised. He was hesitant at first, but over time he warmed up to the idea of being a government official and two years ago he gave in to his parents wishes and switched from History to Politics.

But that wasn't the only reason as to why Leo was so happy, he hadn’t seen Elena in almost two years! He was going to meet her now in some secluded restaurant near the sea.

It was extremely hot inside the bus and Leo had been sitting in it for quite a while now. Everyone around looked unpleasantly depressed in comparison to his own happy demeanor. The bus itself didn't look that old, but it was uncared for, greasy and dirty. Its passengers looked a little different. Leo was effectively the only clean person on the whole bus. Everyone else wore rugged, stained clothing, some even had coal on their faces. It was evening and these people were going back to their homes after toiling in factories all day, while this spoiled young man was smiling widely and holding a bouquet of flowers that he got for Elena, in his hands. Leo clearly sat lost in his own dreams. He didn't even notice that nobody sat near him, nor that several men scoffed after noticing the UWP pin he proudly wore on his new coat to show he was now part of the ruling party.

The freshly baked communist immediately jumped up when his stop was announced. He quickly ran out with the same wide smile he had for the whole drive.

Leo knew the restaurant was somewhere here, he memorised everything Elena told him.

Two buildings to his left, then a turn right, there should be a slim alley way. Perfect.

Leo made another turn and there she was, standing in the dimly lit alley near a beautifully carved wooden door. Leo felt as if she lit up the whole place. She stood firm and strong, her light brown hair flowing down her shoulders and touching with her emerald green dress.
It matched her perfectly. Leo nearly melted when he saw her.

Elena’s stiff face broke into a warm smile as soon as she noticed Leo appear. But before she could even react he essentially dashed forward and gave her a tight hug. He always felt weird hugging Elena since she was taller than him, yet he also loved doing it.

After a few short seconds Leo let go and said:

– And here I thought you could never get more beautiful.

Elena slightly giggled – Hello to you too, Leo.

Then she noticed the pin on his suit and her face suddenly turned cold, so did her voice as she spoke:

– What's this? – Then she snatched the pin off and threw it onto the ground. – You've joined the fucking party? And here I thought you wanted to become a tour guide, in fact I remember you *promising* me you will never join. So how come you are wearing a novice party member’s pin!?

Leo was slightly taken aback by this sudden outburst, he knew Elena was distrustful of the government, but not at this level. Before he could even answer though Elena spoke again:

– This isn't the place to talk about this. – She then took Leo’s hand and pulled him inside.

The restaurant was small and cozy, adorned in ornaments Leo could swear were banned. Most of the restaurant was made of wood and it felt as if they had travelled a hundred years back in time when this part of the city wasn't yet industrialised and filled with apartment buildings. There weren’t many people here, but those who were seemed comfortable.

The whole thing was open and you could clearly see the Julion Gulf in all its beauty, several fishing boats and a yacht could be seen in the distance. However there was also a massive shipping container on the tip of Leo’s eye, moving towards the dockyards in the north.

As they sat down Leo again looked at Elena, her cold and almost angry face was gone and she was smiling again, but it seemed… fake this time.

– My parents used to go here often, I thought it’d be a fitting place for our date, – She spoke. – I'm sorry if I upset you back there, I just didn't think you’d end up joining them.

– “Them”? Don't tell me you are a full on divider now. The government literally saved us from the oppression of the King of his bourgeois aristocratic cronies.

Elena’s smile twisted.

– Do you not see what is going on around you? Are you blind to how people look? Those in rich families like you are still rich while the common man is suffering. Nobody is smiling these days anymore, everyone dresses in the same grey colours and every new building looks just as soulless, your treasured government is bleeding us dry. They want to make us simple sheep, slaves, they are already forcing people to work inhumane shifts every day because they don't give two shits. They only want our labour, our produce, nothing more. Did you know, – Elena nearly started trembling – that my dad died last year? He was forced to work day and night in that weapons factory, and when he got crushed by one of their machines the government blamed him for the disaster, and did we get any compensation like they promised? Ha! Of course not! – She was shaking even harder now and Leo felt she might start crying soon, so he reached her hand and tried to hold it.

– I- I didn't know, I'm so sorry, Elena. It was just the work of a few corrupt officials probably, I promise I won't be like that.

Elena clearly wasn't convinced by his words, but she calmed down. They continued holding hands, looking out into the sea, soon forgetting about politics. After a few minutes of silence Elena smiled lightly and spoke again:

– Let's not talk about politics anymore, okay?

– Yeah, let's.

Just then the waiter came up and they ordered. Elena took a Garthlandian Sour Cream Porkchop while Leo simply ordered potatoes with sausage and salad, the usual modern day meal standard prepared by the state.

Although neither of them forgot the discussion they had at the beginning of the date they quickly got into conversation like old times, chatting about their families, activities, studies and catching up after those two years.

As they were about to leave and rising up from their seats Leo suddenly said:

– No, please remain seated. – Elena gave him a questioning look and sat back down.

Leo then knelt and took something out of his pocket.

– Elena Saldin, will you marry me? – he spoke nervously as he revealed the wedding ring.

Elena looked into his eyes for several seconds, then slowly spoke after a barely noticeable sigh.

– Yes, Leo Durren, I shall marry you, – She smiled, but not altogether sincerely and then said – This was the worst time to ask such a question.

– I try, – Leo responded. This time Elena’s smile felt real.

CHAPTER 2

Outer Vespal
1999

Leo woke up screaming, like every day. Another nightmare, he kept thinking that he will get used to them and their effects will wear off over time, yet every time the nightmare is as fresh as the first time.

Leo looked at the clock by his bed. 3:44 AM.

He tilted his head away from the clock and began to stare at the ceiling.

“Staring at my crappy ceiling, that's all I'm good for now.” – he thought to himself.

After what seemed like forever Leo again looked at the clock, only fifteen minutes had passed.

Nevertheless he decided to get out of his bed and dress up. Just then he remembered that woman from yesterday, and suddenly felt immense shame about how rude he was to her.

“*That's new, I usually don't care about others feelings as much nowadays”* – And then he just scoffed.

Leo got dressed and engaged in his morning routine, like every day.

The cafe only opens at seven, he still has a lot of time, so he took out his picture book and started skimming through it, he does it every morning, but he never gets bored of it, pictures of him back in the 80’s when he was happier and when Elena was still around.

Leo finished the picture book and after putting on his coat, the one he wore almost every day since graduation, he left the apartment and went to the bus stop.

Unlike yesterday evening the bus didn't break down this time.

Leo stepped out of his stop and started walking towards the cafe, he stepped inside at precisely 7:02 AM, like every day.

He was about to sit down in his usual spot to continue sulking in his past when he spotted her. The same woman he bumped into yesterday, she was sitting on the other side of the cafe, reading. Leo stared at her for a while, before shaking his head and sitting down.

The waiters learned not to talk to him, they just bring the same coffee he drinks every time and take the money off the table which Leo leaves when going to work.

A couple of minutes passed, maybe more, Leo was looking into the window, not at what was outside, but at his own reflection. Then someone sat down in front of him.

It was her, the woman stuck in his head since yesterday.

She tried to make the same cold face Leo always had on and stare at him, but she ended up just looking silly, Leo could swear he almost smiled, which surprised him a lot.

They kept staring at each other when she finally broke the silence.

– I'm Lina. Lina Kappel – She tried to offer a hand for Leo to shake, but made up her mind half way and returned her hand to its place.

– John Saldin.

– You aren't local, I thought so, you have an accent, Kolosian I think? I noticed it yesterday. Anyways you dropped this. – Lina handed him a pin.

Leo took it, he completely forgot it was in the coat, his first UWP pin, Elena threw it away the day he proposed to her, but these were too expensive to waste, so he took it back on his way out.

Normally Leo would shoo a person away, but this time he just said:

– Thank you, – and took the pin. His and Lina’s hands touched, hers felt warm.

– So you do have manners after all, – Lina made a smirk, but Leo didn't reciprocate. Instead he simply asked:

– What were you reading there?

Lina was taken a bit off guard by the question, but she swiftly regained her composure and handed Leo a book out of her purse.

– Same book as yesterday.

Leo took the book into his hands and read the title “Ante Wessman, the Gray Man who changed the Veronian psyche”

– Never heard of him, – he said simply while handing the book back to Lina, then he checked the time, it was time to go to work, and he spoke – I must go now.

Leo stood up, left the money in the cafe and walked out.

– Bye. – Lina said quietly.

As Leo walked to work, he thought about his short conversation, over and over. Usually he thought of past events, rarely did he dwell on the present for so long. One thing was clear, this Lina was a nerd.

He was also a nerd once. Once.

Leo entered the hotel, like always he went straight into the dressing room. And then - up and down, up and down.

Monotony, slowly Leo stopped thinking about his cafe encounter and Lina, he again fell back into his past.

Up and down, the elevator goes up and down, someone wants floor six, Leo clicks six, someone wants two, Leo clicks two.

– We seem to be crossing each other at the most random of occasions.

Leo saw Lina walk inside of the lift.

– My cousin is visiting from Neman, my apartment isn't big enough so she is renting a place here, maybe you saw her a few times, – She said.

– I don't keep track of the people I lift, – Leo responded, still feeling weird with how his monotony was intruded.

– I'm not surprised. I need room three o’ nine.

– Floor 3, got it, – Leo clicked the button “3” and the elevator buzzed upwards.

Neither of them spoke for the whole short while. Then the elevator reached floor 3 and Lina broke the awkward silence.

– We will go down using the stairs, I'll see you around.

She dashed out of the lift. Leo attempted to return to his routine, but this time he was unable to.

Julion 5th hospital, Kolosia
February 1985

Leo burst inside of the Birth Section of the hospital

– I came from the Ministry as soon as I heard the news, where is she?

– B-birth room two, sir, – the nurse mumbled, clearly terrified of Leo. Last year he became the Minister of Media, the youngest to date, at only twenty eight years of age. However the death of Chairman Jon Maladore heralded an opportunity for people like him to arise, the transition of power into Wilhelm Dimmel’s hands was smooth, but many old officials were still discharged from duty and many open positions appeared, and the young and charismatic Leo ended up filling one.

– Lead me there, – Leo said, the nurse just nodded and swiftly showed birth room two to Leo, before vanishing. But Leo did not care, he was already inside the room.

Elena was lying in bed, holding a baby in her hands, looking at it. Two doctors were whispering something to each other on the side, but Leo didn't care, he went straight to Elena and sat down near her.

Only then did she see her husband. She smiled so widely and warmly that she could light up the darkest corners of Leo’s eroding soul.

– Say hello to your daughter, Leo. – Elena spoke as she handed the child to her husband.

Leo took her in his hands and looked at her, she had his eyes, they looked intelligent and deep.

– She is beautiful, are we still giving her the name we thought of?

– Yes, Gunhild.

– I still find that name silly, – Leo giggled a little bit, by now all the stress of work and running to the hospital had disappeared. – Remind me to name our next child myself.

– If I give birth to them I should have the right to name them, – Elena went silent for a bit before saying, – I feel so tired, but I don't care, let me hold her again.

Leo complied and handed his daughter back into his wife's arms.

A few minutes past of pleasant silence passed before Elena said:

– I want to be home more, let's raise her together, please, Leo, you have to resign from your position. – Elena looked Leo straight into the eyes, she was never happy with his career choice, such questions were common in their relationship. Leo just defaulted to his usual answer:

– You know I can't do that, honey, I want you and Gunhild to have a stable future, nor can I deny my duty to this Republic.

Elena frowned, – Fine then, leave us alone.

– But, I can-

Leo’s message was cut off before he could finish it:

– I said leave us alone. That means get out!

This time Leo didn't say anything, deciding his wife needed time to cool off, he left the room while Gunhild started crying, likely startled by her mothers tone.

CHAPTER 3

Outer Vespal, Veronia
1999

Leo entered his usual cafe, it had been a week since he met Lina, she now appeared in the cafe every morning, Leo was beginning to suspect she specifically came at the same time as him to talk.

They progressed slowly, Lina did most of the talking, and they did not talk about much, small talk, mainly. Nevertheless Leo began to feel… better, almost. The world felt a little bit more bright and although it was still monotonous and deep down he still felt the horrors haunting him, he was feeling a bit pleasant. Although you couldn't tell so from his outside appearance.

– So, John, I assume you are Kolosian, your accent and surname match with such a description, – Lina said.

Leo stayed silent at first, before taking a breath and responding:

– I am, I was born in downtown Julion, however my parents were from Roxolania.

– Woah, that's a lot coming from you, usually I can't even get your opinions on the weather, you just sit there silently. – She giggled half-heartedly.

Leo did not reciprocate, nor did his face even flinch.

– That pin, the one you dropped last week. It had communist symbolism on it and I was wondering if… – She trailed off and gave Leo a questioning look.

– I used to work for the United Workers Party, they gave out such pins to all party novices.

– Oh, I see.

Leo did not know why he was telling her all of this, he hadn't even known her for a week, but he couldn't stop and started telling a lot more than he should have.

– My parents were hardline monarchists, but not truly, they only believed in the system which benefited them most. When I was three years old and

the revolution happened they flipped their opinions, becoming “true” revolutionaries and bootlickers of the new system. And thus they got to keep all of their shiny trinkets and money. I detest them for this and always will, I didn't see it then, but now it is clear as day, – Leo changed his expression to that of disgust, the first time he had done so in front of Lina, however she did not comment, immersed too much in what was being told.

Leo continued:

– Elena told me this many times, but I was blind to the truth. They sent me to Florion University, the best in the country. The revolution was supposed to make it free and accessible to all, yet now that I look there wasn't a single student from a working class family, and the university was filled with propaganda, I assume that's why my parents sent me there. To become like the rest of the sheep and be a politician they could boast about. I was distrustful of the government at first, mayhaps because I hated my parents, but when studying their propaganda got into me, because young minds are the easiest to mold into your desired shape. After studying I joined the party and after the UWP rule fell I fled here. – Leo decided it best to leave out everything that transpired in between the last two events.

– What did you do while working for the party? – Lina asked, however Leo did not respond, his face slightly flinched, it was barely noticeable, but he knew Lina noticed it.

The old communist then asked, the first real question, usually it was Lina who was initiating their conversation s:

– How about your own past?

Lina realised that she will not get an answer to her question, so she answered his:

– It's not that interesting, I grew up in the countryside, my parents weren’t very rich and couldn't afford me an education. So I studied, studied and studied, got into university, finished it. And now I work in the museum nearby.

– There is a museum around here?

– It's right around the corner, you must not have been here for very long if you don't know it.

– Five years, I've been here for five years.

– Ah.

After that - silence. Leo looked into the window, like he used to do before meeting Lina. While she probably had no more questions in mind. He didn't know.

Leo sighed.

– John Saldin isn't my real name. I made it up as I came here.

– Does it have any special meaning? – Lina asked.

A slight tremble could be heard in Leo’s voice as he spoke.

– Saldin was my wife’s surname, and John was her fathers name.

– You have a wife? – A glint of disappointment appeared in her eyes.

– I had a wife, and kids, – Leo’s voice was still slightly trembling, but it also turned cold and almost antagonistic.

However Lina did not seem to notice, or did not want to, she asked:

– Oh, what happened to them?

Leo was silent for a second or two.

– I killed them, and I don't mean it in the way that was some “accident” that I couldn't foresee. I *killed* them

Before Lina could respond he stood up angrily and stormed out of the cafe, spilling his coffee while leaving the table and forgetting to pay for it.

Leo tried to walk to the Hotel he worked at, but he felt dizzy. It was all coming now, stronger than before.

He arrived ten minutes earlier than he usually did, his coworkers looked at him surprised, but he did not notice. He just changed into work clothes and got inside the elevator.

Up and down, up and- there was no one there to ask to be lifted, the monotony didn't work. Everything came flashing in front of his eyes again.

Ministry of Internal Affairs, Julion, Kolosian Socialist Republic
May, 1991

Ever since he became the Minister of Internal Affairs the previous year Leo Durren got a lot busier.

He was now the second highest ranking person in the whole country, only Chairman Wilhelm Dimmel ranked above him, many were whispering that after the Chairman died Leo would inherit his position.

However he saw it as a curse, he rarely got around to being home and he felt Elena growing distant from him. He wasn't even around when their son was born.

But that wasn't it. Already as Minister of Media Leo began to notice how rotten the UWP was, he began to slowly detest it, yet he still worked for them, he believed he could change it and he kept telling himself it was just a problem of his time, even if deep down he didn't really believe it.

As the controller of Media and propaganda he signed off on orders, people who were deemed "psychopathic" or as “terrorists”. He let them be investigated, he didn't even notice that it was because they weren't following propaganda and that's why they got under the government's radar. They would be sent to “re-education camps”, a lot of government funding was allocated to them and they were all being told they were secure and that people there were taken care of.

But as the Minister of Internal Affairs Leo saw the true side of those camps, they weren't there for helping people with psychological issues or to help them live comfortably without harming the public. No. Those

camps were designed to kill. To bleed people slowly of anything they could give under horrible conditions and force them into inhumane jobs.

He realised that most of them were innocent, all they did was question some of the government's policies, often not even that, they would be reported by their neighbours with no real proof and still sent out.

Yet he spoke to no one about this, every higher up new of the camps, but they never mentioned them. And Leo continued signing orders, feeling worse and worse with each one as he realised what they meant.

He slowly forgot the world around, waking up only to go sit in his office all day and come back home only to scream. Elena did not shout at him, but she ignored him, which was even worse.

He had just signed another order, he stopped reading them after a while, just signing to sign, but today he did. It was a directive to “discharge” one hundred people from the camps who could no longer work efficiently. But Leo knew, they won't be discharged, that's just a fancy way of saying they will be killed. He sat for what seemed like hours before he finally signed the order with trembling hands, after all it was already too late for them anyways. Everyone around was like this, they just work in the system, never adding anything new or expressing their thoughts. It's all empty bureaucracy. And people are afraid to confront others or themselves.

Leo did not know what exactly was used to kill, he never spoke about it, he was too afraid. He knew of suspicious shipments of military grade chemicals and acids, the kind that's banned by the LFN, being shipped to the camps. Those gases could choke a person without him knowing, they were invisible, you just had to fill a room with it and everyone would instantly die, without even seeing or feeling what killed them. Acids of that kind could dissolve a human body completely and leave no trace…

Thinking about this made Leo sick, he tried diverting his thoughts when someone spoke:

– Comrade Minister?

His secretary's voice called out from the corridor.

Leo bolted his head upwards, suddenly thrown out of his thought trance.

– What is it?

– You are being summoned to the interrogation room. Comrade Hegel is already there.

Leo (susiraukė). Alaric Hegel, the head of the secret police, or “Citizens Protection Agency” as they called it, was no good news. And if he wanted Leo it must have been important. But he didn't care, he hated the interrogation room.

– Tell him I'm not coming.

– Comrade Minister, he insisted.

– Was I not clear enough?

Leo began slightly raising his voice, he shouted at his employees a lot recently, it always got them in line. But the secretary didn't look scared, he only said:

– It's about your wife, comrade Minister.

The Minister's eyes widened.

– This isn't a joke, is it? – He said standing up.

The secretary did not answer while Leo stepped out of his office, moving faster and faster towards the interrogation room.

By the time he was there he was effectively running. – “*This must be a misunderstanding, Elena wouldn't cause trouble, not now, not after I signed that order to kill so many people. The world can't do that to me”.*

He thought as he approached the interrogation room in the basement of the Ministry, two CPA agents saw him and bowed slightly, Leo opened the door.

And there she was, Elena, his wife, tied up in the white chair. Her eyes were filled with rage, and when she stared at Leo with them he felt his heart sink.

The interrogation room was small and dimly lit, all it had was a white white doctors chair in the center. Leo could swear there were loads of torture devices here somewhere.

Without Elena there were three other people in the room, two CPA agents Leo had never seen before, and their leader Alaric Hegel.

Leo never liked Hegel, the man always had something mad in his eyes, he seemed to love talking about what people to remove or kill, often getting into gory details, which was unusual in their bureaucratic society. But he was very efficient and was granted his position by Maladore himself, so no one even thought of firing him.

And despite being rather short Hegel always looked threatening.

He spoke as soon as he noticed Leo walk in, his face in a wide grin.

– Ah, Comrade Minister! You finally came, good, good. This miscreant here, who we believe is your wife, just tried to steal from us.

– Did you do anything to her? – Leo simply asked.

– No, not yet, – Hegel responded, still grinning.

– I don't care what she did or did not-, Leo said, but then was cut off.

– I don't need your support. – It was Elena’s voice, ridden with disgust. And as Leo gave her a wounded look she spat at him, – Communist filth, I can't believe I was so foolish as to marry you. You are just like the rest of them! You sign orders to kill people without even thinking, you don't even care do you?! – Leo stood near the door dumbfounded, Hegel quietly signaled his agents to stay back, he wanted to see what happened, to feel pleasure in seeing others' pain and anger. Elena continued:

– Do you know what happened to my mother? No, of course you don't, you never asked, you didn't care. Well she was living her life like anyone else, I don't know what she even did, say something bad about a politician, anger a coworker who then reported her? They shipped her off and I never saw her again, and last week I found out it was you who signed the order, *you!* I trusted you! And you- you, – she stopped for a bit before inhaling a deep breath and continuing, – the resistance approached me, they asked me to get documents from here, proof, proof

of all your wrongdoings and information, anything sensitive that could help their efforts. AND I'VE GIVEN THEM ALMOST EVERYTHING, all your crimes, all your precious sensitive government information!– She started laughing hysterically, – I saw your signature on all those orders, you, you made it all happen, how do you even sleep at night? – She asked sarcastically, still half-laughing.

Suddenly Leo felt a surge of rage take over him, everything he had to take care of and hide recently, all that anger, came pouring out at his wife:

– What did you do?! You used me! I fucking knew it, you never loved me in the first place, you just wanted to use me to achieve your goals. It was all just part of your plan, and all this sentimental nonsense you spat at my face now? I know what it means, you think it will *touch* me, weaken me to let you go and roam FREE?! AS IF I'M THAT STUPID! You filthy traitor, you don't get it, none of you do, what we are doing is necessary for our people's survival! You could have seen it, I tried to convince you, but you hated me from the very beginning, it was a lost cause I see it now!

He had never shouted this hard before, Elena looked a bit startled for a few seconds. Leo didn't even believe what he was saying, but he still said it, he could not think properly. It was all too much.

– I've had enough of you, – he spoke coldly, – Comrade Hegel, take her away! Away from me! I don't want to see her disgusting face ever again! Lock her up, rip her fingers out, I DON'T CARE, and take her out, DO ANYTHING!

With those words Leo slammed the door behind him and ran back to his office. He could swear he heard Elena screaming, but maybe his imagination was playing tricks on him.

He lumped back in his chair, but he couldn't stay there and started circling in his office. How could she? How could they? Why? Why was this all happening?

Leo saw a bottle of Divian whiskey, gifted by someone he didn't remember, he started galloping on it, maybe it would help.

It didn't.

After what felt like hours the door creaked open and Alaric Hegel walked in, grinning widely.

– Our little “issue” has been taken care of, comrade Minister. Elena Durren is no longer here, disposed of. I liked her screams, they were strong, – the little man giggled. – Sadly she did not tell us anything either, we gave up soon and got rid of her, the body has been liquidated in acid and disposed of. Soon she will be declared missing and the problem will be no more.

Hegel giggled again.

Leo just sat there at his desk, completely drunk, Hegel’s words were muffled, as if they were spoken under water. And then it clicked. *The body has been liquidated in acid…*

No, it couldn't be.

He must have misheard.

– What? What the fuck did you just say to me, you bufoon. Where is my wife, take me to her now, we will sort this out.

The leader of the secret police looked at Leo strangely.

– Sir, she is gone, that is what you told us to, “take her out” you said. So we did.

Hegel was still grinning while Leo slumped to his feet.

– GET OUT OF MY OFFICE! – He tried to shout, unsure if he actually did. Hegel quietly left, smiling widely.

It was him, he killed her, he gave the order.

CHAPTER 4

Outer Vespal
Spring, 1999

The memories still felt so fresh. As if it all happened yesterday. The interrogation room… Elena shouting at him…

The order he gave to kill her.

If only that was it.

But he had composed himself since the morning.

The shift had ended. All he had to do now was return home in monotony.

Except there wasn’t monotony.

Someone was following him. Leo clearly noticed it now. He couldn't see the stalker, but he felt watched, he knew someone was there, tracking his every move.

Or not. Maybe his mind was playing tricks on him.

Leo walked back into his home, checked the empty mailbox and walked to his apartment. He put in the keys and opened the door.

The light was on.

And someone was sitting on his couch.

That face could be recognised anywhere. It was small and ugly, highly wrinkled and filled with pimples. And it grinned in such a horrid way.

Leo hadn't seen Alaric Hegel since nineteen ninety two, when the head of the secret police dropped him off in Meletaria, memories of those specific days were blurry in Leo’s head, compared to scenes of his horrors and crimes, those he always saw in perfect detail.

Hegel never knew not to smile, but his smile was different to that of others. It was always cruel, always looked wrong.

He wore his old outfit. Distinctive of the chief of the CPA. A grayish black jacket with red stripes with the agency's symbol on one arm and the emblem of the UWP on the other. He also wore a pin, one of those given out to veteran party members.

– What are you doing here?

Leo said the moment he walked in.

– Waiting for you, comrade Minister. You grew a beard, makes you look like a raccoon.

– Don't call me “comrade”.

– My mistake, I forgot that you now have this fantasy that you are no longer one of us. But remember, Durren, once a UWP member, always a UWP member. You may have forgotten it, or tried to forget it, but we won't, and neither will everyone else. – His grin grew ever slightly larger.

– What do you want?

– You ignored all our letters. So I came to talk to you in person.

– I am not interested, you can leave now.

Leo gestured towards the door.

But Hegel just continued smiling and said:

– You used to be the brightest mind in the whole country, the best of the best! You climbed the ranks of the party and Chairman Dimmel even expected you to succeed him? Where did that man go? What happened to him?

– What happened is we killed my wife. And my kids. The UWP killed the true me too.

Hegel just shot back:

– “We” killed your wife? I recall it was you who gave the order, comrade Minister. I was just obeying your orders.

Leo’s face turned red from anger, but he only calmly stated:

– Get out of my home, or I will call the police.

– Very well, suit yourself, but note that they are on to you. And if they finally strike you have the potential to reveal a lot of dangerous information about the Restoration Movement.

– I am no snitch, – Leo said.

Hegel got up from the couch and approached the old official, he put something in his hands.

– I know you aren't, but just in case. These are Skarput pills they use some substance from that island, just one pill digested through the mouth will clog your lungs and you will be dead before you know it. Only its use differentiates medicine from poison.

And then he walked out, Leo closed the door, more so slammed it.

The day was very intense, and he felt more anger than he had in ages. He had to sleep. But before that. He looked at the pills. Thought of throwing them out. But he only placed them in his coat pocket and went to sleep. Prepared for the usual nightmares.

Julion, Kolosia
April 11th, 1992

Tensions were high.

Higher than ever before, the country was on the brink of revolt. There were mass riots all over the country, some territories had even slipped out of UWP administration.

And Dimmel did nothing, they all did nothing, in fact the chaotic atmosphere in the country did not affect them, they sat in their offices signing and making orders like always. The system was not prepared for such a crisis, unlike under Maladore or Guileri himself no swift action was being taken, everything was stagnant. Stale.

Leo didn't care, ever since Elena died he sort of lost a part of himself, he no longer had many thoughts about anything. Only memories, nightmares at night, ghosts of his past taunting him, Elena, her mother, all those souls he sent to die with the stroke of a pen.

Yet he still signed the orders because he knew nothing else to do.

It was late, he was taking a bus home, he didn't notice the angry looks everyone shot him, one grandma spat in his face, but Leo just continued walking.

Right at the door of his home he felt immense shame. He had completely neglected his kids, leaving early and returning late to just sleep and leave early again. Effectively the nanny raised them.

Although he did not actually want to do it, Leo told himself that he will spend this evening with them.

And so he entered the house.

It was a mess.

Broken windows, shattered furniture, graffiti over his walls. He did not read it, he didn't care.

– Gunhild! – He shouted, without much passion, no response came.

Only then did he notice the blood, it was dripping from the sofa. Leo came closer and looked at it from the other side.

The nanny was there, her head bashed by something, you could see the brains, poking out. On the left and right of her lay his kids, or what was left of them, their heads were cut off and placed back on their bodies, surrounding the nanny. All three of their eyes were open, staring at Leo. They knew, they knew it was his fault.

And then he looked up and saw what was written on the wall, in bright red, couldn’t be blood, but it sure looked at it.

“THEY WILL NOT GROW UP TO BE A TRAITORS CHILDREN”

Leo didn't burst into tears, he did not start screaming, or swearing revenge, he did not have it in him.

He just took off his coat and went to sleep.

But he knew. He knew. It was his fault it was all his fault, if only he was different. If only he hadn't written that *damned application!*

CHAPTER 5

Vespal
1999

Up and down.

After the incident at the cafe Leo stopped coming there in an effort to not bump into Lina. A few days had passed since then, the sudden appearance of Hegel angered him a lot and brought back a new wave of memories. Guilt. Everything.

Up and down. Someone says “floor five” he clicks five. Up and down.

And so on.

Then Lina entered the elevator.

Leo noticed her, but did not say anything. Neither did she. She said no floor and no number, but Leo instinctively clicked on 8, highest floor, they will go up and then down.

– I'm sorry if I upset you. That time at the cafe. I didn't…I didn't know. – She tried to instigate a conversation.

Leo stayed silent.

And then she looked him straight in the eyes, he could not help, but stare back.

– Please, don't just ignore me, come to the cafe the next morning, l will be there and we will talk again, okay?

No response.

Lina sighed.

– There was no point, you are as solid as a rock, nothing I say will get past that.

The elevator again hit the first floor and the door opened, and Lina was about to walk out when Leo spoke:

– You are making a big mistake taking an interest in me, – he looked to the side. – But I will come.

The elevator door closed.

Soon after the time came, the end of shift, time to go home.

Leo took off his work clothes, put on his old jacket and left the hotel.

The bus was three minutes late, it was annoying, but the trip itself was like it normally was.

He stepped out in his stop and walked towards his house, it wasn't far.

He had nightmares that night as well.

However he woke up feeling…different, he thought of Lina and the prospect of talking with her that day, he tried to tell himself he should not go, but he still did it. He even combed his hair and trimmed his beard properly, something he hadn't done since forever.

Leo left his apartment and began to walk towards the bus stop at 6:30 AM sharp, the bus will be there in 6:38 and he should make it on time.

There was a crowd of people in front of him. They were whispering something to each other and scattering around something on the ground. Leo would usually avoid such a group, but there was no way to get past them unless he crossed the whole block from the other side.

So he went in, pushing through people, not even caring what they were looking at.

He was about to get out, but something caught his eye, on the ground, it was a pin. He leaned down, nudging around people, who grunted in annoyance, and picked it up. Leo very much recognised it, it was a veteran UWP member pin. “*The one worn by…*”

He didn't finish that thought, instead he looked at what everyone was examining in a flash. It was a body.

The face was mangled beyond recognition, just a pile of blood and what remained of bone. However everyone could see this person was a midget.

A jacket was on the body. Black with red stripes, there used to be something on the upper parts of the jacket's arm sides, symbols, but if they were there they were carefully erased. No, they were there. Leo knew who wore this jacket.

And who lay in front of him.

Just then someone appeared in front of the body.

– Get out of the way, damnit! This is a crime scene, not a fucking spectactle!

A detective investigator. They always sent these guys out first to examine bodies. Leo took this as his que to leave. Which he did.

He had to speed up his pace to still make it in time to his bus.

Julion, Kolosia
April 12th, 1992

Leo was still stunned from yesterday, he dared not look at his couch when leaving. Not a glance. He did not want to confront it. Soon it will be another nightmare, just that…

He expected everything to feel the same, but things felt different, or maybe he only then noticed his surroundings.

The bus did not arrive in time, so Leo had to walk to the Ministry, which was not far.

He walked through the streets of Julion, there were closed signs everywhere, and loads upon loads of homeless people, one old man, he looked like he hadn't eaten in weeks, stuck to Leo and kept asking for bread.

There were sounds in the distance, shouts, police sirens, gunshots ringing aloud.

Leo walked into Guileri’s avenue, formerly Leuben avenue, renamed in honour of the socialist republic's founder. It was empty, only one man was walking around. It was spring yet the trees planted in honour of the victims of Drosinium looked dead.

Right ahead, at the end of the avenue, stood the Palace of the People, and just right of it, at the end of the next street, stood the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Leo walked forward lifelessly, getting closer step by step. The Palace of the People loomed ahead, the residence of the Chairman and the very heart of the UWP political structure. It looked grim and dull. Looming over the entire avenue like as if it wishes to swallow it whole.

The building once housed the Senate, and an avenue was created starting from it in the late twenties by the Senate to enhance their own prestige and show that they cared for the victims of the Great War. After the Senate was abolished by the King, the building was abandoned for decades until the coup. Robert Guileri, the architect behind the revolution and the man who couped the monarchy, established his own residence here. He rebuilt the crumbling structure and called it the “Palace of the People”. But in reality it was a palace for him and his bootlicker party - the UWP.

Currently Dimmel occupied the Palace, Leo remembered that there was a party congress there right now. He should have been present, but over the death of his…

He stopped thinking and just continued to walk. He won't go there. He’ll go straight to the Ministry and sit down in his office and continue signing documents like usual.

He was about to make the turn, when a massive explosion rang out. Just the sound alone could have made him deaf. But that wasn't nearly as bad as the shockwave, it sent Leo flying for what felt like meters until he hit the pavement, it hurt.

He felt dizzy for a while, his eyes were blurry.

But eventually he got himself together and sat back up with his eyes closed. There were various sounds all around, but he could not distinguish them.

Then he opened his eyes.

In front of him stood a smouldering ruin, what used to be the Palace of the People and the symbol of the regime. It was now gone, with everyone inside. The implications were clear. The days of the UWP were done.

CHAPTER 6

Cafe "Lend Ilen", Vespal
Spring, 1999

Leo opened the cafe doors and entered right on time, Hegel's dead body was still fresh in his mind, but he forced himself to stop thinking about it as he saw Lina sitting in his old usual spot.

He walked to her and sat down too without a word.

– Hai, – She said with a nervous smile. Although Leo found it beautiful still.

– I came. Like you asked. – He simply stated.

– Yeah, well, I wanted to say sorry, again, for upsetting you that day, I really didn't mean it. – She spoke a bit too swiftly.

– I'm aware of that, Lina.

– You can go now, if you want, and I won't pester you anymore if you do.

But Leo remained seated, the waiter came and he just said to bring his usual, since the waiter explicitly asked. Also noting that he will have to pay double for last time.

– So, if John Saldin is just an alias, what is your real name?

She straightened herself with those words, likely fearing another unexpected outburst. But Leo simply said:

– Leo Durren, that is my birth name, somewhat.

Wrinkles appeared on her face, the name probably sounded familiar to her and she tried to remember it, but Leo was sure that she didn't fully recognise it.

– Leo… It's a nice name, but it's more Koroselian than Kolosian, no?

– It is, originally my parents named me Leodewald, after some nineteenth century admiral they had some forgotten blood ties to.

– When and why did you change it?

– I didn't, my parents did, when I was three. Same year as the revolution. The name smelled old, monarchical, so they changed my name to just Leo. Sounded more fit to them and the new regime. And yours?

– Named after my grandma, nothing more, nothing less.

– I see, – Leo responded simply.

The waiter brought their coffees, he insisted Leo pay now, which he did.

After that silence set in and they started drinking.

– Will you go to work soon? – Lina broke the silence.

– Yes, in a bit, right after I finish, or soon after that, the speed of the waiters and my own drinking I cannot time precisely.

– Riiiight. Oh, hold on a bit.

With those words Lina pulled something out of her purse, a pen and a sheet of paper. She scribbled something on it and gave it to Leo.

– Here my number and my address. Just in case you can't find me here.

Then she smiled and stood up.

– I think it's fitting that I leave first this time. Good day, – she paused for a bit, and spoke slowly, – Leodewald? I hope I'm saying that right.

– Good day, Lina Kappel.

This was the first time ever that Leo said goodbye to her.

Julion, Kolosia
April, 1992

After the explosion everything went blurry, it was hard to remember what happened after that.

Leo remembered clearly seeing the ruins of the Palace of the People, then he was picked up by some strong hands and now he was in some vehicle. A truck by the looks of things. But it was hard to see, soon after he drifted into deep sleep.

Being on a truck did not help, the nightmares didn't go away even then. Elena was shouting at him. Calling him a monster. Then everyone else joined in, his kids, their nanny, people he never even saw before, they all shouted the same words, calling him the worst thing to ever happen to them.

Leo woke up still moving, this time his vision was clearer. He looked around and confirmed to himself that this was indeed a truck, an army truck. Rays of sunlight were penetrating it, Leo didn't know how, but he felt it was morning, which would mean he was blacked out for a whole day.

Alaric Hegel was sitting right in front of him. The truck bumped into something and Leo was also bumped off his seat for a bit.

– You are awake! Finally, – Hegel spoke, grinning. His voice felt forcibly sweetened.

Leo decided not to respond.

– I was beginning to think you would never wake up, comrade Minister. I was told you were staring at the ruins of the palace blankly, horrible sight yes, very tragic. Chairman Dimmel is dead, so is half the party, the

capital is in flames and the army is in chaos. It had to be abandoned. If my men hadn't found you we might have lost you as well. But thankfully you are still here, now with you as our leader we will surely win the upcoming war and everything will go back to normal. Perhaps you will even give old comrade Hegel a promotion?

No response came from the former Minister.

Hegel gave him an annoyed look, he almost took off his grinn.

– Have you gone deaf, Durren?

– I hear you perfectly fine.

– So what's the issue?

– I'm not playing your games, this all sickens me, get me out of this country, right now. To anywhere, I don't care where, *far away from here.* I want to get out as soon as possible, do you hear me, *comrade?* – Leo spoke the last word with clear distaste.

The head of the secret police just smirked:

– And to think you were one of the best. We will drop you off in Proletarians Port, or Meletaria as some still call it. Our presence there is pretty strong, but after that you are on your own. You better come to your senses soon.

The truck hit another bump while Hegel stood up and went to the front of the truck.

CHAPTER 7

Vespal, Veronia
1999

The shift ended, but Leo did not feel the same way he usually did, instead of thinking about the past or Hegel's body he thought of Lina the whole time, he almost smiled to some customers, but not yet.

Perhaps, perhaps she was what he needed to get better, perhaps he could finally put the past behind him.

He decided, tomorrow he will tell Lina everything, the whole truth, everything about his past, his crimes, his guilt and regrets, someone needed to know, someone who would understand. She will, he knew it.

One thing still bothered him however. He still felt watched. He assumed it was Hegel at first, but now that he was dead that explanation didn't sit right.

Something else was going on.

With this in mind he opened the door to his apartment.

And immediately felt someone put a rug over his mouth and strong hands pinning his hands and legs. Then something popped, a pill? Leo couldn't finish the thought because he lost consciousness shortly thereafter.

He woke up tied to a chair. It took a bit of time to regain full awareness, but by then he already understood that this was just a normal chair. When he finally decided to look around he realised he was in the basement of his building. There was a giant lamp right in front of him, flashing at him.

The rug was gone from his mouth and he could probably speak now if he wanted.

Leo couldn't directly see anyone, the lamp did not permit it, but he was certain that there was someone behind it.

Then a voice rang out:

– Don't even think about screaming, we examined this area and it is completely soundproof, beside the door, but we patched that. No one will hear you. – The voice sounded abnormal, something was clearly wrong with it, but Leo couldn't make out what it was, as if it was only partly human.

Then a man stepped into the light of the lamp. He looked young, about twenty years old. He had slightly curly hair and a rather handsome face. He wore a simple, plain, brown coat with no additions and at first glance he did not look very threatening.

But this face…everything about him felt wrong. He looked human, but he didn't feel like one. There was something…unnatural about him.Leo didn’t want to admit it, but there was terrifying about that man.

The man then spoke again:

– Agent Brian Redsworth, NID, – he pulled out some card and flashed it to Leo, it was a card of an NID agent by the looks of it. – this card is fake of course.

– What do you want?

The man, Redsworth, only chuckled, but even that sounded unreal. – There is a lot you can give us, Mr. Durren. Or should I say there was. – He started walking around the room. – You see we initially came here to extract information from you, but then that idiot Hegel came to you. You should have seen how he screamed, we barely started the torture and he was already spouting out more than we needed. With the information from him we will soon eliminate your “Restoration Movement” and then Kolosia and our King, Dameric, long may he live, will reign unopposed by you, the relics of a bygone era.

Redsworth stopped and looked straight at Leo, as if he was waiting for a response. And although he didn't want to play by this so called agents wishes Leo still spoke up:

– You already admitted that there is nothing you can gain from me anymore. So why bother? Why are you still here and why am I confined to this chair?

– A good question, exactly what I expected from you. Well, Durren, the present isn't the only thing that concerns us. The past too. You have committed many, many crimes against the Kolosian people, – he said it only in a way someone who didn't care about people could. After those words Redsworth made a pause, before speaking again, – and your own family.

Leo felt the memories all rushing back again. It was as if it all happened yesterday. While Redsworth continued:

– Your crimes are too numerous to forgive, and too large to forget. That is why we are here. To give you your punishment. We've been observing

you for quite a while, you'll be oblivious to physical pain. So we will strike where we know it will hurt. Your precious heart, which has miraculously not gone stale yet. But before that. A video.

Suddenly the lamp was replaced by a monitor. And what it started playing made Leo stop breathing. It was a recording. A recording of Elena's last moments. As Hegel was testing out all his tools on her. The screams were so loud, much louder than they were before. Leo closed his eyes, but he could still hear it, and his imagination forced him to see it. Soon after he started screaming too:

– No! Make it stop! Please. Please. MAKE IT STOP!

But the video continued. For what seemed like forever. And then, the popping of a pill, and he went back to sleep.

Doucha, United Socialist Democratic Republics
1994

The topic on the news on the TV then changed, the reporter was young and energetic, he spoke much too quickly:

"On April 15th of 1992 the chaos in Julion came to an end when a previously unknown monarchist guerilla fighter by the name of Wulfram Breiden entered the city with the two year old Dameric Gerhatold, the main male scion of the family which had ruled the country before the revolution, in his hands. And with a large force of monarchist militia men armed with Burenian weapons.

Breiden restored order in the city with his militia men and support from the nearby Kingdom of Burenia. He set about creating a new Kolosia, one free from communism and again under a monarchy like it was during its glory days.

UWP holdouts survived for a little longer than their state, with support from socialist Melat they battled the monarchist forces until 1993 when the last independently functioning communist force capitulated. It would

take another year for the Melatians to be finally pushed out of Kolosian soil.

Now, Kolosia is finally free from the communist yoke as a modern, constitutional monarchy, which will host its first elect-”

The TV was broadcasting Koroselian news in Standard Dormanic, before someone turned it off. Leo didn't listen, not really, he heard words, but he did not care for their meaning and did not understand what was being spoken. After the channels switched the man in front of him finally stopped shuffling around his papers.

– Since you expressed a desire to hide and refused to join the Restoration Movement we have rented you an apartment in Veronia and found you a job, after all you remain one of us, comrade Durren. We hope you will get better and eventually join our movement. – The man’s voice was completely mechanical, it was some old member of the UWP, a nobody back home, but probably somebody here in exile after half the party died.

– We have also created fake documents for you. – The man continued to talk, – all that's left is for you to fill them with whatever new name you wish to have.

Leo snatched the papers from the man's hands and left without a word.

He didn't want to stay here any longer than he had to.

That same day he boarded a plane and left for Vespal.

CHAPTER 8

Hotel “Emperor Isaac”, Vespal
1995

Leo was in the elevator. He had been working here for a year now and had gotten used to the rhythm. Up and Down. Up and down.

An old man walked into the elevator, he asked to be brought to floor eight.

So Leo clicked eight.

He was trying to rhythm with the elevator, but the man had a radio with him, which was probably on max volume and it threw Leo off track:

“...Last week the Kolosian government under Wulfram Breiden announced the creation of the National Intelligence Division, or NID for short, according to Regent Prime Minister Breiden this institution will exist for domestic use and only for curbing terrorism in the country, however skeptics have noted that this organisation could easily be used abroad against Kol...”

The man stepped out of the elevator and Leo went back down.

Vespal
1999

Leo woke up in the same chair he was interrogated on, the NID was gone and he was completely untied.

He slowly sat up. But fell down as soon as he remembered what happened.

“Was that it?”

He had never felt more tortured in his life, but it felt like…little.

Too little.

There must have been more. Did he just forget?

Leo stood up and walked over to the basement door. It was unlocked.

He checked his pockets. Everything was still there. The NID did not take anything.

Then he felt it. A small paper. He took it out. It was Lina’s number and address.

Lina…

Then he went pale.

It was the middle of the night, yet Leo ran outside. The address was close by, he could do it. He ran faster than he probably ever did before.

And reached the door.

It was an apartment building like his. Lina had written her apartment number. He rang it several times.

No response.

There was no way to get in. Should he wait?

Leo started frantically checking his pockets. Trash, trash, keys, more keys.

More keys? He only ever carried one pair.

He took out the keys he had in his coat. Without questioning Leo used it on the door. It buzzed open. He ran inside to apartment number nine.

And again, the keys were a perfect match.

And there she was. Right in front of him. On her couch. Staring at him. Her eyes unnaturally opened and her mouth arrayed in a ugly grin. Her neck was sliced by something sharp.

It was reminiscent. Too reminiscent of that time, how on Earth did *he* know about that?

And then Leo slumped down on the ground, realising that another person was dead… because of him.

EPILOGUE

Leodewald Durren was walking.

He did not know where. He did not care where. Vespal scenery flashed around him in all its modernity, yet he saw none of it.

He knew what had to be done. If he continued the cycle would repeat. Redsworth would make sure of it.

He was no sane man, he wasn't even worthy of being called a human.

And Leo used to hate Hegel, think that he was cruel and inhumane, but that- that creature was worse.

Lina wouldn't be the first, he would do it again and again, kill *everyone* who even got close to Leo.

No.

That won't happen.

He *won't* allow it.

A bridge appeared in front of him. Not a normal bridge, a train bridge, in fact it was hardly that, all it was was a passage below a train line. It was the first thing Leo truly saw since leaving Lina’s home.

He walked into it.

And then he stopped. At the center of the tunnel.

And sat down.

A train whooshed above, faster than any other train.

He stood up again, not even knowing why.

It was dark.

The dead of night.

Yet he could still see the pills.

He swallowed them all.

And as he trembled and collapsed on the pavement, a small object fell out of his worn coats pocket and onto the ground.

It was a pin.

A novice party member’s pin.